

Binge Drinking

Definition: Binge drinking typically refers to the consumption of five or more alcoholic beverages for a man, and four or more for a woman, on a single occasion. It also refers to drinking with the intention to get drunk.

Q: Who are binge drinkers?

A: Binge drinking has increased over the last decade, especially with youth between the ages of 15 to 25. A 2003 Canadian Community Health Survey found that almost 21 per cent of Canadians 12 years of age and older binged on alcohol 12 or more times a year. Binge drinking is most common with university and college students who are adjusting to a new phase in their life and dealing with new anxieties and pressures related to post-secondary life. Students may turn to alcohol to ease their fears or to self-medicate their anxieties, or they may use alcohol because it is a common part of the post-secondary social scene.

Q: What are the dangers of binge drinking?

A: Binge drinking can lead to harmful outcomes including car or other accidents, sexual assault, unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, violence, or alcohol poisoning. Alcohol is quickly absorbed into the bloodstream, effecting perception, judgment, memory, coordination, and concentration. Because alcohol depresses the central nervous system, drinking too much alcohol quickly can lead to the shutting down of bodily functions, such as the gag reflex, breathing, heart rate, and brain functions, which can result in choking on vomit, loss of consciousness, falling into a coma, experiencing cardiac arrest, or death.

Q: What are the long-term effects of binge drinking?

A: In the long term, binge drinking may result in alcohol dependency or addiction. Binge drinking can also result in long-term physical damage to the body. Binge drinkers can experience liver damage, such as cirrhosis (chronic liver disease and loss of liver function) or cancer. They are also at greater risk for various heart diseases, including strokes, heart attacks, enlargement of the heart, and high blood pressure. Brain damage, such as decreased thinking abilities or the development of mental disorders, can result from the destruction of brain cells. Women who binge drink even once while pregnant put their child at risk of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and other developmental disorders, including hyperactivity, behaviour problems, and learning disorders.

Binge drinking is also referred to as "chugging" or "funneling"

(Canada Safety Council, 2002)

46% of male and 43% of female high school students in B.C. who drink admitted to binge drinking in the past month

(McCreary Centre Society, 2003)

Youth who abuse alcohol have problems with memory, learning, and other brain functions

(Alcohol: Clinical and Experimental Research, February 2005)

A 2005 Ontario survey of students in grade 7-12 reported that 23% of students binged on alcohol at least once in the past 4 weeks

(2005 Ontario Student Drug Use Survey)

25% of Canadians between 12 and 19 years of age binge drink more than 12 times a year!

(Statistics Canada 2000/2001)

Q: How can I help someone who may have alcohol poisoning from bingeing?

A: Binge drinking may lead to alcohol poisoning. By falling unconscious, the body protects itself from further harm. If you are unable to wake someone up after they have passed out from drinking too much, or if they begin to vomit in their sleep, have seizures, or fail to react if you pinch their skin, call 911 for an ambulance immediately as alcohol poisoning can lead to death.

If you think that someone has drank a dangerous amount of alcohol, use the **Bacchus Maneuver**:

1. Raise the person's closest arm above their head and roll them gently toward you, guarding their head as you roll them
2. Tilt their head to maintain an airway and tuck their nearest hand under their cheek to maintain their head in a tilted position
3. Check on them often until the ambulance arrives.

Q: How can I drink responsibly?

A: Drinking responsibly means not drinking to get drunk or drinking as many drinks as you can in as short a time period as possible! To drink responsibly, alternate your drinks with a glass of water, juice, or pop; pace your drinking; sip your drinks instead of gulping them, stay away from drinking or chugging games; don't drink on an empty stomach; learn when to say that you have had enough; and, do not give in to pressure to drink more than is safe for you. Always plan a safe way to get home ahead of time if you're going to be drinking. For more information and resources, contact the B.C. Centre for Social Responsibility (www.bccsr.ca) at (604) 870-5940.

Resources

- Statistics Canada. www.stat.ca/english/freepub/82-221-XIE/00604/tables/pdf/2157-03.pdf
- McGill Student Health Services. <http://www.mcgill.ca/studenthealth/information/drugs/alcohol/>
- Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission. http://parent.aadac.com/addiction_info/alcohol_abcs.asp
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Personalised Alcohol Use Feedback. <http://notes.camh.net/efeed.nsf/feedback>
- Ontario Student Drug Use Survey. <http://www.camh.net/research/osdus.html>